

WRITERS AND THEIR WORK: NO. 118



Trollope

by

HUGH SYKES DAVIES



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GENERAL EDITOR

Geoffrey Bullough

¶ ANTHONY TROLLOPE was born on 24 April 1815 in London. He died on 6 December 1882 at Harting, Sussex.



TROLLOPE
from a drawing by 'SEM'

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TROLLOPE

I

ANTHONY TROLLOPE was born in 1815. His father was a barrister, learned in law, but of difficult temper and unpractical in the management of his affairs. The first twenty years of his son's life were overshadowed by the gradual failure of the legal practice, and by a series of ill planned and worse executed manoeuvres to make money in other ways.

The ruin of the family was delayed, and at the last made less ruinous, by Anthony's mother, Frances Trollope. One of her husband's weirdest schemes was to set up a great bazaar in Cincinnati, and he despatched his wife to America to supervise its building, in a striking medley of classical and oriental styles. Funds were exhausted before it could be stocked with goods, and Mrs Trollope found herself in penury. She learned from this crisis not only that she must herself take on a great part of the task of supporting her family, but also a possible means of performing it. On her return to England, she wrote her first book, a racy and rather acid study of the American way of life. It was successful, and she went on at once to write novels and other travelogues. When her husband finally became bankrupt in 1834, she took the family to Belgium, and supported them by her pen, never laying it aside for long, even while she saw to the housekeeping, and tended the deathbeds of her favourite son, her husband, and her youngest daughter. Her later days were happier and more prosperous, but she went on writing indefatigably when the financial need had passed. When she died, at the age of eighty-three, she had written forty-one books, and her annual rate of production had not been far below that achieved by Anthony himself. They were both late starters in literature: he was forty when

his first book was published, and she fifty-two. For both of them, the first conscious aim in writing was to make money; but once started, they both found that it satisfied in them needs much deeper than that of money.

Possibly Trollope inherited from his mother some qualities of mind and spirit that favoured quick and copious writing, and certainly he had before him her example of what might be made of these qualities. But the deeper needs which writing came to satisfy were the unhappy by-product of his father's misfortunes. When he was seven, he went to Harrow as a day-boy. At twelve, he was moved to his father's old school, Winchester, but taken away three years later because the bills had not been paid, and could not be paid. Long before his departure, the other boys had known of the unpaid bills, and had made use of their knowledge. 'It is the nature of boys to be cruel,' he mildly observed of their doings when he wrote of them in later life. But worse was to follow, for he went back to Harrow again as a day-boy. By this time, his mother was in America, and he was living with his father, unkempt and uncouth, in a gloomy tumbledown farm-house, from which he tramped twice a day through muddy lanes to sit among the well fed and smartly dressed boarders. 'The indignities I endured are not to be described,' he wrote later. 'I was never able to overcome—or even attempt to overcome—the absolute isolation of my school position. Of the cricket-ground or racket-court I was allowed to know nothing. And yet I longed for these things with an exceeding great longing. I coveted popularity with a coveting which was almost mean. It seemed to me that there would be an Elysium in the intimacy of those very boys I was bound to hate because they hated me. Something of the disgrace of my school-days has clung to me all through life.'

He was removed from Harrow at last by the bankruptcy of his father, and went with the rest of the family to Belgium, a useless and aimless witness of their successive deaths. At the age of nineteen, however, he was wangled by family

friends into the Post Office as a junior clerk; competitive examinations to the Civil Service being still to come. In later life, he wrote and spoke vehemently against that mode of recruitment, on the ground that it would certainly have excluded him, and that the Service would have lost a good official by his exclusion. Probably he was right on both points, yet it would not have been easy for any department to function with more than one or two Anthony Trollopes on its strength. He was unpunctual and insubordinate, and he got into 'scrapes'. Once, in an argument with the secretary, he banged a table so hard that it catapulted an inkwell into his chief's face: since the Post Office was at that time ruled by a retired Colonel, he was lucky to have escaped dismissal or something worse. And one day the office was invaded by a lady under a vast bonnet, with a basket on her arm, crying loudly, 'Anthony Trollope, when are you going to marry my daughter?' He did not have to marry the young lady, but he admitted that 'these little incidents were all against me in the office'.

This period of his life lasted for seven years, and it is the one period of which he has told us very little. He lived in poor lodgings, spent much time in bars, got into debt and made his one and only acquaintance with a money-lender. He began, however, to make friends and, after the disgrace of his schooldays, it was much to him that men of his own age were willing to like him, to talk with him, and to spend their week-ends walking with him. In the office, he kept his place, largely because he turned out to be very good at writing letters, and in the end even his 'scrapes' did him a backhanded service, for the ink-stained Colonel recommended him for a job in Ireland, as the best way to be rid of him.

It was a very great service, however backhanded. Ireland accomplished a transformation in him hardly less dramatic than that which characterizes the life-cycles of insects. Hitherto, his state had been dark and larval, or chrysalid at best, and his days had been spent in obscurity and lonely

poverty. ‘From the day on which I set foot in Ireland,’ he wrote, ‘all these evils fell away from me. Since that time who has had a happier life than mine?’ The essence of the Irish magic was that for the first time he found himself among people who liked him, who did not regard him as a shameful and useless encumbrance. The work was not in an office under superiors, but in the open air on his own, riding up and down, making arrangements or putting disarrangements to rights. He became good at the work itself, and passionately fond of riding. He took to hunting, and found a hobby that was his only major addiction to the end of his life. After three years of this new life, he married, was promoted, and soon began to write his first novel.

He spent most of his time in Ireland until 1859, and remained in the Post Office until 1867. He rose from being an ill-reputed and difficult clerk to being an efficient but still rather difficult public servant, with a flair for negotiating with all kinds of people, of many nations. He had a fine eye for the practical—he was the inventor of the English pillar-box. Above all, he made himself useful to his department in ways which meant that he was kept on his travels, rather than in an office. He came to know many parts of Britain itself, and visited Egypt, America and the West Indies on postal business. He hunted two days a week, and became a haunter of London clubs, partly for the sake of whist, partly because his acquaintance was now reaching up into higher circles of society and letters. And on top of all this, he wrote books at the average rate of 1·7 per annum, and made money by them.

So, in middle life, he found all that he had missed as a boy—respect, friendship and worldly success. And he enjoyed it all, hugely and noisily. He banged about the world, rode about Essex and other hunting counties, fell off his horse and lost his spectacles and laughed: dined at the club and laughed: dined at home or with his friends and laughed. In 1882, he was laughing at a comic book read

aloud with his family after dinner when he had a stroke, from which he died a month later.

He had been successful, and had valued his success all the more because of his early failures. 'To be known as somebody,' he wrote, 'to be Anthony Trollope—if it be no more—is to me much.' But to understand both the man and his work, it is needful to set this beside that other verdict: 'Something of the disgrace of my schooldays has clung to me all through life.'

II

The above quotations are all from Trollope's *Autobiography*, written in 1875–6, but not published until 1883, a year after his death. Its reputation has kept pace with the recent revival of respect for his novels, and it is now probably one of the most widely read of English autobiographies. This modest popularity it well deserves. As an account of his life, it is so complete and so just that his biographers have added little to its detail, and less to its broad outline. It is in no sense a work of intimate self-revelation, and was not intended to be. It is rather a *tour de force* of self-description by a man who, sitting for his own portrait, brought to it precisely the same technique of direct solidity which he had developed in painting scores of portraits in his novels. He did not even spare himself the slightly ironic distance from which he usually observed his male characters. And what it describes is not merely an attitude taken up for the occasion, but one which served him constantly for the more serious purposes of self-regard.

Yet the self-portrait is a little uneven, clearly delineated where his habitual perceptions were strong, but fainter and more confused where they were weak. His strength lay in describing the manners and morals of the world in which he was so anxious to bear—and even more anxious to deserve—a good name; and in his account of his dealings with this world, he has a natural rightness and honesty

which enabled him to behave well, and to describe clearly. His moral standards were not, perhaps, very profound or very subtle, but they were worthy and workable, and they made his conduct better than that of many men who were his superiors in moral perception. His weakness lay rather in his attitude to his own writing, and to literature in general. Here he fell into confusions and distortions which have harmed his reputation and—what is worse—damaged his work.

The problem for him lay in a simple contradiction. On the one hand, he was trying to rise in the world by writing novels; on the other hand, the world into which he wished to rise did not have a high regard for novels, or for those who wrote them. ‘Thinking much’, he said, ‘of my own daily labour and of its nature, I felt myself at first to be much afflicted and then to be deeply grieved by the opinion expressed by wise and thinking men as to the work done by novelists.’ To this problem, he found two possible answers. Very early in his career as a novelist he proposed to write a history of English prose fiction, which was to have ‘vindicated my own profession as a novelist’ by demonstrating in the work of his predecessors and contemporaries ‘that high character which they may claim to have earned by their grace, their honesty, and good teaching’. But this history was never written, though a few of its leading ideas are suggested briefly in Chapters 12 and 13 of the *Autobiography*. The other possible answer, on the contrary, was made fully, loudly and insistently, throughout the book. It was that novel-writing should be regarded as a profession like any other, and that the object of the novelist, like that of every other professional man, was to make money for himself and his dependants. Nor was this object an unworthy or base one. ‘It is a mistake,’ he wrote, ‘to suppose that a man is a better man because he despises money. Few do so, and those few in doing so suffer a defect. Who does not desire to be hospitable to his friends, generous to the poor, liberal to all, munificent to his children, and to

be himself free from the carking fears which poverty creates?' This was the answer to which he committed himself, and it was elaborated in almost every account he gave of his dealings with publishers, up to the last page of the *Autobiography*, with its detailed financial statement of his earnings from each of his books, meticulously totalled to £68,939 17s. 5d.

It was, perhaps, the answer most likely to impress the world which he sought to impress. The men he met in the hunting field, or over the card table at his club, were more likely to accept it than that other argument about the good done by novelists in the moral education of their readers; and they were more likely to welcome among them a professional man just such as they were themselves—barristers, clergymen, engineers—who made no claim to be doing more than earn a good living. But though it was perhaps well fitted for this purpose, it was wrong, even perversely wrong. The novelist is not, of course, exempt from the common necessity of earning a living. But he earns it as a novelist, rather than as a barrister, a clergyman, an engineer, a politician or a confidence-trickster, because his tastes and abilities carry him to the novel rather than to any of these other lucrative activities. Yet although Trollope could not, or would not see this, it is typical of him that he gave a faithful report of the manner in which his own tastes and abilities were turned in this direction. Writing of those disgraced schooldays, and of the hardly less disgraced years as a clerk in the Post Office, he said this:

I was always going about with some castles in the air firmly built within my mind. Nor were these efforts at architecture spasmodic or subject to constant change from day to day. For weeks, for months, if I remember rightly, from year to year, I would carry on the same tale, binding myself down to certain laws, to certain proportions. Nothing impossible was ever introduced,—nor anything which, from outward circumstances, would seem to be violently improbable. This had been the occupation of my life for six or seven years before I went to the Post

Office, and was by no means abandoned when I commenced my work. There can, I imagine, hardly be a more dangerous mental practice; but I have often doubted whether, had it not been my practice, I should ever have written a novel. I learned in this way to maintain an interest in a fictitious story, to dwell on a work created by my own imagination, and to live in a world altogether outside the world of my own material life.

It is here, and not in the passages on money-making, that Trollope describes his real impulse to write novels. He became a writer, not because of his need for money, but because of his talent for imaginative day-dreams. It was natural that he should have confused the need with the talent, for both drew their strength from the same source. The former was a conscious passion, almost an obsession, because it was the outward symbol of his desire to rise above those early outward troubles, and the latter also was passionate, but more obscurely, because it had been his hidden inner resource against them. The confusion was natural, but none the less unfortunate. At first it prevented him from discovering where his true gift lay, and even after this discovery, he under-rated its value in himself. In deference to the standards of the hunting-field and the club, he abused and exploited it by writing too much and too quickly, without waiting for his imagination to gather weight and depth. Like some of the more enterprising bankers of his time, he possessed genuine gold, but made it serve to support a recklessly diffuse paper circulation.

III

Misconceiving both his own powers and the nature of fiction, Trollope fell an easy prey to the shallower notions of his age about the way novels should be written. It was his job, he supposed, as an honest professional man, to provide his customers with the commodity they expected; and what they expected, he was taught to believe, was

'realism', slices of life faithfully observed and entertainingly told, with a few touches of wholesome morality. When he first resolved to write a novel, the life that lay under his eyes was that of Ireland, so he cut a few slices from it, observed them industriously, and wrote them down as best he could. His two Irish novels were failures, as they deserved to be. An historical novel followed, as dismally cluttered up with book-learning as the Irish novels had been by unimaginative reporting. Then he tried his hand at a guide-book, but the publishers to whom specimens were sent omitted to read them, and the project was dropped.

He was turned from these false starts, from his conception of the novel as a mere animated guide-book, not by any growth of literary perception on his own part, but by a lucky accident of his official career. In 1851 he was given the task of organizing country posts in South West England, and for two happy years he rode up and down and about in six or seven counties, visiting many places, meeting many people, but always in a hurry. It was his first experience of England outside London, and its combination of variety and hurry was exactly what his imagination needed to work upon; the materials offered to it were extensive, but he moved too quickly to become bogged down anywhere. From these wanderings, he got, not another careful slice of life, but a hazy, rich impression of towns and villages, of churches and country houses, of clergy and laity, and of the quietly intricate patterns of their manners and social life. It was upon this impression that he based his first truly imaginative novel, *The Warden*, the first of that Barsetshire series which has come to be regarded as his highest achievement. The book was conceived one summer evening in Salisbury, but the Barchester of the novels was never merely Salisbury, nor was the county round it any one of the counties through which he had travelled. It was pieced together from memories of them all, and though it grew to be so clear in his head that he once drew a very detailed map of it, its solidity was imaginative, not geographical. In the same

way, the clergy who were its main characters were not of his acquaintance. 'I never,' he tells us in the *Autobiography*, 'lived in any cathedral city,—except London, never knew anything of any Close, and at that time had enjoyed no peculiar intimacy with any clergyman. My archdeacon, who has been said to be life-like, and for whom I confess I have all a parent's fond affection, was, I think, the simple result of an effort of my moral consciousness. . . . I had not then ever spoken to an archdeacon.' Similarly, the great journalist Tom Towers was thought to be very like an eminent man on the staff of *The Times*, and *The Times* itself, in its review of *The Warden*, mildly rebuked the author for indulging in personalities. But at that time, Trollope protests, 'living in Ireland, I had not even heard the name of any gentleman connected with *The Times* newspaper, and could not have intended to represent any individual by Tom Towers. As I had created an archdeacon, so I had created a journalist . . . my moral consciousness must again have been very powerful.'

This gift for the creation of character by the use of his moral imagination was revealed for the first time in *The Warden*, but it had been developed through those long years of day-dreaming, and in its own rather unusual direction. His private fantasies had not been adventurous, nor had they conferred upon him glittering social status. 'I never became a king,' he tells us, 'or a duke . . . a learned man, nor even a philosopher. But I was a very clever person, and beautiful young women used to be fond of me. And I strove to be kind of heart, and open of hand, and noble in thought, despising mean things; and altogether I was a very much better fellow than I have ever succeeded in being since.' This passionate and genuinely imaginative concern with moral existence was the essence of his approach to the novel, from *The Warden* onwards. Above all, it was his chief means of insight into character and its depiction. The physical characteristics of his personages are rarely made clearly visible, though they are often conscientiously

described. It is their moral physiognomies that are sharply drawn, through what they do and say, what they are said to think and feel, and not seldom by direct comments upon them from their maker.

In the type of moral character chosen for portrayal, *The Warden* set the pattern to which he kept in nearly all his later novels. There was no villain, indeed no character much below the middle range of the moral scale, nor was there anyone conspicuously above it, save the Warden himself. Trollope became exactly what he wished, the moral historian of men and women in the middle range, the usual run of humanity—‘with no more of excellence, nor with exaggerated baseness—so that my readers might recognize human beings like to themselves, and not feel themselves to be carried away among gods or demons’.

Finally, *The Warden* was typical of all the novels that were to follow in its disregard for plot. It would, indeed, have been incompatible with his choice of the middle range of characters to have involved them in sensational and complicated situations: ordinary people commonly lead ordinary lives. But apart from this, the elaboration of remarkable incident was quite irrelevant to his main purpose—the depiction of moral character. It mattered little to him how his creatures were set in motion, for once they were on the move they had so great a capacity for living their own lives. In *The Warden* itself, he posed them a problem about the proper use of church endowments, a contemporary, if not a burning issue: just such a case had arisen in Winchester when he was at school there, and was still before the courts many years after he had written this book. But he himself had no clear view of its rights and wrongs, nor did he need one. All that he needed was the opportunity to let his imagination play upon its issues and cross-issues, as they would appear to differing modes and degrees of moral sensibility. And it was in the process of doing this that men and women—not issues—came alive under his hand.

IV

The intense moral realization of his characters gave them, once created, a very tenacious hold upon his imagination: so tenacious that he was often unwilling, almost unable, to let them go. His two most notable creations in *The Warden* were of this kind, and they were carried on into *Barchester Towers* (1857), *Doctor Thorne* (1858), *Framley Parsonage* (1861) and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867). Other characters were added, of course, and some of them obtained almost as close a grip on their author's affections. Other novels were written in the same period, many of them. But Archdeacon Grantly and his father-in-law went on leading their lives in his imagination, growing older as he grew older, yet always themselves as he remained himself. Of the two, the Archdeacon was the more prominent and active, and much more akin to Trollope. His father-in-law, who had been Warden in the first book, stood at the upper limit of Trollope's moral range, and once he had made his great decision in that first episode, there was little for him to do in the world but be gentle to his family and friends, play his 'cello, and take good care of the music in the cathedral. Yet he did all this in such a way that we are made to feel his virtue, his religion even, beyond any description that Trollope felt able to give. The Archdeacon was coarser in grain, quick to anger, but quick to forget his anger, more worldly, but generous and warm-hearted. The two existed side by side, as characters must often do in fiction, making a richer pattern by their contrasting qualities than they could ever have made separately. When the older man came to die, it was through the mouth of the Archdeacon that Trollope expressed his estimate both of the dying man, and of the Archdeacon:

I feel sure that he never had an impure fancy in his mind, or a faulty wish in his heart. His tenderness has surpassed the tenderness of woman; and yet, when occasion came for showing it, he had all the spirit of a hero. I shall never forget his resignation of the hospital. . . . The fact is,

he never was wrong. He couldn't go wrong. He lacked guile, and he feared God,—and a man who does both will never go far astray. I don't think he ever coveted aught in his life,—except a new case for his violoncello and somebody to listen to him when he played it. Then the archdeacon got up, and walked about the room in his enthusiasm; and, perhaps, as he walked some thoughts as to the sterner ambition of his own life passed through his mind. What things had he coveted? Had he lacked guile? He told himself that he had feared God,—but he was not sure that he was telling himself the truth even in that.

Nothing is more like Trollope himself than this moment of explosive self-perception. The Archdeacon, like his creator, had standards by which to measure his fellow men, and he was tolerably sure of their general rightness. But when he came to ask how far he himself measured up to them, he had his awkward moments. He had coveted many things, greatly: a Bishopric, power, the ruin of his enemies, wealth, and above all in his later days, the glory of his children. He had indeed done his best for them, and they had not done badly for him. His daughter was a marchioness, and though her husband the marquis was unquestionably a moron, she was still unquestionably a marchioness. His eldest son, Henry, had done well in the Indian Army, had won the Victoria Cross, and a wife with a little money. The wife had died, leaving the young widower with a baby daughter, but Henry still had his fine record, some money of his own, and a handsome allowance with his father. He had retired from the Army, and was settling in Barsetshire as a country squire, with land and farms and horses and foxes of his own.

All this had been achieved by stern ambition, and not without guile; and whatever God might think about it, the Archdeacon was usually well pleased with his achievements. In *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, he was sorely tried because Henry fell deeply in love with a young woman, the daughter of a cleric the very opposite of himself, pious, very poor, unworldly, and to make the worst of an already bad job, awaiting his trial on a charge of stealing a cheque. So

outrageous was Henry's choice, that his father opposed this new marriage, even threatened to stop the allowance. The struggle between father and son was long and obstinate on both sides, and even the mother's intervention was not able to end it. It was brought to its climax, and at the same instant to its solution, in an interview between the Archdeacon and the girl herself, which illustrates as comprehensively as any passage in Trollope both the emotional force of which he was capable, and the moral standards which he accepted without question. The first part of the interview does her credit—more credit than the Archdeacon had expected. She refers to her father's disgrace, and gives her promise that unless his name is cleared, she will marry nobody:

The archdeacon had now left the rug, and advanced till he was almost close to the chair on which Grace was sitting. 'My dear,' he said, 'what you say does you very much honour—very much honour indeed.' Now that he was close to her, he could look into her eyes, and he could see the exact form of her features, and could understand—could not help understanding—the character of her countenance. It was a noble face, having in it nothing that was poor, nothing that was mean, nothing that was shapeless. It was a face that promised infinite beauty, with a promise that was on the very verge of fulfilment. There was a play about her mouth as she spoke, and a curl in her nostrils as the eager words came from her, which almost made the selfish father give way. Why had they not told him that she was such a one as this? Why had not Henry himself spoken of the speciality of her beauty? No man in England knew better than the archdeacon the difference between beauty of one kind and beauty of another kind in a woman's face—the one beauty, which comes from health and youth and animal spirits, and which belongs to the miller's daughter, and the other beauty, which shows itself in fine lines and a noble spirit—the beauty which comes from breeding. 'What you say does you very much honour indeed,' said the archdeacon.

'I should not mind at all about being poor,' said Grace.

'No; no; no,' said the archdeacon.

'Poor as we are—and no clergyman, I think, ever was so poor—I should have done as your son asked me at once, if it had been only that—because I love him.'

'If you love him you will not wish to injure him.'

'I will not injure him. Sir, there is my promise.' And now as she spoke she rose from her chair, and standing close to the archdeacon, laid her hand very lightly on the sleeve of his coat. 'There is my promise. As long as people say that papa stole the money, I will never marry your son. There.'

The archdeacon was still looking down at her, and feeling the slight touch of her fingers, raised his arm a little as though to welcome the pressure. He looked into her eyes, which were turned eagerly towards his, and when doing so he was sure that the promise would be kept. It would have been sacrilege—he felt that it would have been sacrilege—to doubt such a promise. He almost relented. His soft heart, which was never very well under his own control, gave way so far that he was nearly moved to tell her that, on his son's behalf, he acquitted her of the promise. . . . As he looked down upon her face two tears formed themselves in his eyes and gradually trickled down his old nose. 'My dear,' he said, 'if this cloud passes away from you, you shall come to us and be my daughter.' And thus he pledged himself. There was a dash of generosity about the man, in spite of his selfishness, which always made him desirous of giving largely to those who gave largely to him. He would fain that his gifts should be bigger, if it were possible. . . . He had contrived that her hand should fall from his arm into his grasp, and now for a moment he held it. 'You are a good girl,' he said—'a dear, dear, good girl. When this cloud has passed away, you shall come to us and be our daughter.'

It was thus that Trollope created the most solid of his male characters, by a temporary merging of his own personality in theirs: here, he has all but put himself into the Archdeacon's shoes and gaiters. But the merging was never uncritical, because he was critical of himself; he was always capable of qualifying a virtue, of noting an unworthy doubt, and took frequent pleasure in slight backhanded ironies at the expense of their inner weaknesses, as he did at the expense of his own.

As for the girls, he was inclined to be in love with them in the same vicarious fashion. His contemporaries, we are informed by a review written in 1867, liked to make gentle jokes about his intimacy with the minds of his heroines:

how, they asked, had he managed to 'find it all out'? And shortly after his death, Henry James accurately noted the nature of his relation with them:

Trollope settled down steadily to the English girl; he took possession of her, and turned her inside out. He never made her the subject of heartless satire . . . he bestowed upon her the most serious, the most patient, the most tender, the most copious consideration. He is evidently always more or less in love with her. . . . But if he was a lover, he was a paternal lover.

It was, indeed, the English girl who saved Trollope from the labour of devising plots. She was there to be loved, and love for her was enough to set in motion not only one or two young men, but their families too. For only if the love went hand in hand with an income large enough to support marriage—and marriage in the style to which both parties were accustomed—could it run all smooth. All that was needful then, to produce a story with situations full of doubt and perplexity was to bring the power of love into conflict with the demands of property and social status. The ensuing confusion would involve not only the lovers, but their families and friends, and as wide a circle of acquaintance as might be needed to fill a three volume novel. Trollope made this discovery early in the Barsetshire series, and thenceforward he never bothered his head with plots. 'When I sit down to write a novel', he blandly observed, 'I do not at all know, and I do not very much care, how it is to end.' For this relief, he was almost entirely indebted to the English girl with her ability to inspire love, and to the Victorian sense of property with its inveterate tendency to make love injudicious. As the great tragic conflicts in French classical plays tend to arise from the opposition of love and honour, so Trollope's arose from love and property.

But it would be unjust to present him as becoming thus involved only with young lovers, or with characters on the

whole amiable and admirable. Such was his involvement in any creation of his own that he was almost equally capable of becoming devoted to personages neither young nor amiable. In the Barsetshire novels, for example, the Archdeacon's arch-enemy is Mrs Proudie, wife of the Bishop and mistress of the palace which the Archdeacon had coveted so much, and which his father had held before him. Mrs Proudie is probably the best-known virago in English fiction, above all for her achievements in hen-pecking her husband, yet even to her Trollope developed a powerful attachment. The manner of her death was curious. One night at his club, he heard two clergymen criticizing him for carrying the same characters from novel to novel, and they were very hard on Mrs Proudie. 'I got up, and standing between them, I acknowledged myself to be the culprit. "As to Mrs Proudie," I said, "I will go home and kill her before the week is over." And so I did . . . but I have never dissevered myself from Mrs Proudie, and still live much in company with her ghost.'

V

The Barsetshire novels have come to be regarded as Trollope's chief, if not his only contribution to literature, both by the common reader and by the general run of critics and literary historians. They hold this position partly through their own merits of character and milieu, but partly because they can so easily be made to satisfy the common reader's most common weakness in his choice of fiction, his liking for some more or less adult fairyland where he can take a well earned holiday from the tougher and duller realities of his own life. 'Barset,' J. B. Priestley has observed, 'is a haven of rest.' It is natural enough that novels whose main setting was rural England, and whose main characters were so often country clergy, should have been appreciated in this way. But it is an injustice to this series of novels to

perceive in them no more than pleasant placidity, and it can easily lead on to a still greater injustice in estimating Trollope's work. For the more solid qualities in this series are to be found in many of his other novels, where the milieu is less obviously fairy-like, but where his central virtue of moral imagination shows itself both with greater depth and with wider range.

These qualities are nowhere more massively developed than in the linked series of novels which ran through his later life, much as the Barsetshire series had run through his earlier years, the 'political' novels, whose central characters are Plantagenet Palliser and his wife Glencora: *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864), *Phineas Finn* (1869), *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873), *Phineas Redux* (1874), *The Prime Minister* (1876) and *The Duke's Children* (1880).

The main setting has moved from Barsetshire to London, and the main characters are men of wealth and high social status, leaders in their professions and in the House of Commons. The general impression is one of greater 'realism', at any rate in so far as this world is clearly more remote from any conceivable fairyland than Barsetshire had been. But, in following Trollope's achievement in this less idyllic milieu, it is even more necessary to realize how much it issued from his imagination. It had been the dread of his boyhood, as he walked to Harrow along the muddy lanes, that 'mud and solitude and poverty' would be his lot through his whole life. 'Those lads about me would go into Parliament, or become rectors and deans, or squires of parishes, or advocates thundering at the Bar,' he supposed; and he told himself that he would never live among them. But with the success of his middle years, he had after all risen to live among them. He knew Members of Parliament, thundering barristers, and the brother of his closest friend was Dean of Ely. And in 1868, he tried to rise still higher, by standing as a candidate for Parliament himself, at Beverley. He was defeated, and both the fact and the manner of his defeat left a very sore place in his spirit. But if he could rise no further

himself, his imagination could go where it liked, and its expeditions were the main impulse of the political novels. This was his own view of them—and as usual he saw himself with accuracy:

By no amount of description or asseveration could I succeed in making any reader understand how much these characters (Palliser and Lady Glencora) with their belongings have been to me in my latter life; or how frequently I have used them for the expression of my political and social convictions. They have been as real to me as free trade was to Mr Cobden, or the dominion of a party to Mr Disraeli; and as I have not been able to speak from the benches of the House of Commons . . . they have served me as safety valves by which to deliver my soul.

In this way, his defeat at Beverley gave him a new imaginative impulse, and at the same time ensured that his imagination would not get itself bogged down in too much minute observation. His acquaintance with the political world, like his earlier survey of south-west England, was both wide and vague enough to give him precisely the kind of rich but hazy impression which left his imagination neither starved nor shackled.

In the political novels, as in the earlier series, there is a vast array of characters, and most of them are set and kept in motion by Trollope's usual forces, love and property. But in the central character, Plantagenet Palliser, the chief interest is subtler and deeper. It is a long, full study of a conscience, delicate in itself, and even more perplexed because its owner has wealth, a dukedom, political power, and a very thin skin. The close of *The Prime Minister* is a good example of what Trollope's 'moral consciousness' could make of this material. Palliser has been Prime Minister for three years, as head of a coalition Government. When it falls, his old friend and ally, the Duke of St Bungay, expresses the hope that he will take some office in the next Cabinet. 'I don't think I could do that,' Palliser told him, 'Caesar could hardly lead a legion under Pompey.' But when their talk was over, he found himself regretting 'that

apparently pompous speech by Caesar. . . . Who was he that he should class himself among the great ones of the world.' In the days that followed, this moment of unintended arrogance irked him almost more than the end of his power and the formation of a new administration. A few weeks later, he was talking with his late Chancellor of the Exchequer, one of the few political allies he respected, and by him he was given this assurance:

'If the country is to lose your services for the long course of years during which you will probably sit in Parliament, then I shall think that the country has lost more than it has gained by the Coalition.'

The Duke sat for a while silent, looking at the view, and, before answering Mr Monk,—while arranging his answer,—once or twice in a half-absent way called his companion's attention to the scene before him. But, during this time he was going through an act of painful repentance. He was condemning himself for a word or two that had been ill-spoken by himself, and which, since the moment of its utterance, he had never ceased to remember with shame. He told himself now, after his own secret fashion, that he must do penance for these words by the humiliation of a direct contradiction of them. He must declare that Caesar would at some future time be prepared to serve under Pompey. Thus he made his answer.

This is a more interesting process of the moral life than any studied in the Barset novels, and the observation is more penetrating: few moralists have noted so clearly the part which a small phrase, almost a chance phrase, can play in bringing the fluid confusions of the inner life to a point where they crystallize into decision.

But the fine conscience of Plantagenet Palliser is more than an individual study. It is also at the centre of Trollope's political world, and he finds in it the explanation of a process of change in England which was otherwise mystifying. He was himself a Liberal, though with many touches of the Tory in his temperament. He approved in general of the slow process of amelioration which was going on in his day, the gradual spread of democracy and of education to

wider sections of the population. He even approved of the extension of the franchise, but at the same time he wondered at the fact that some of the great Whigs, especially those of wealth and title, should be willing to use their political influence for its own destruction, by encouraging it to pass into the hands of millions of men with votes to be cast in secret ballot. Palliser is the type of such a Whig, and in his exact and exacting conscience Trollope finds the explanation of this remarkable change. No other English novelist, and few historians, saw the problem so clearly, and advanced so convincing a solution for it.

It is this extension of his ‘moral consciousness’ to the whole pattern of English life that informs the political novels, and justifies to the full the remarkable tribute which Henry James paid Trollope a few years after his death:

Trollope will remain one of the most trustworthy, though not one of the most eloquent, of writers who have helped the heart of man to know itself. . . . His natural rightness and purity are so real that the good things he projects must be real. A race is fortunate when it has a good deal of the sort of imagination—of imaginative feeling—that had fallen to the share of Anthony Trollope; and in this possession our English race is not poor.

VI

Trollope wrote forty-seven novels, and since few readers will wish to read them all, some answer is needed to the question, which are best worth reading? It is not easy to find one, for quite apart from the large number involved, there are few that fall markedly below his usual level, and perhaps even fewer which rise much above it.

The verdict of the common reader has always been that the Barset series should be regarded as his best and most typical work, and that there is little point in going much further with him. His more serious and persistent readers, however, generally believe that the ‘political’ series is at least

as good, and very probably better. Beyond this, there is confusion. Are the other three dozen novels merely an extension of the Trollopian world over a wider area, a repetition of his favourite themes and his familiar types of character under new names and against slightly shifted scenery? Or do some of them present qualities not to be found anywhere in the two central series?

The second argument has been urged with much force in a study by Mr Cockshut, which sets out to alter radically the accepted view of Trollope's whole work. It contends that Trollope's outlook was, especially in the later part of his life, much less superficial than has usually been supposed, less orthodox, less bluffly optimistic, and more prone to question the assumptions of the age about morality and property. In the light of this contention, the emphasis of attention is changed both within the two main series and in the novels outside them. In the Barset novels, it falls above all on the lonely agony of Mr Crawley, the clergyman wrongly accused of stealing a cheque, but not sure within himself that he is innocent. In the 'political' series, it falls upon the madness of Mr Kennedy in *Phineas Finn* and *Phineas Redux*, and the appalling loneliness of his wife, Lady Laura, who has married him for his money—or at least refused to marry the man she really loved because he had no money. And in *The Eustace Diamonds*, Mr Cockshut finds Trollope's first decisive movement towards satire, and to a view of goods and chattels not wholeheartedly Victorian. With this alteration of emphasis in the better-known novels, there goes the claim that what is most important in them was often more fully developed elsewhere. The gloom and loneliness of the individual, for example, was explored most deeply in *He Knew He Was Right*, which traces the degeneration of a husband from unreasonable jealousy of his wife into actual madness. The fullest development of satire is in *The Way We Live Now*, and of the attack on property and inheritance in *Mr Scarborough's Family*. These, and other of the outlying novels,

Mr Cockshut would place in the forefront of Trollope's work, for these and such-like reasons.

This study has been usefully done; it provokes a more careful reading of some perhaps unduly neglected novels in the later period, and corrects some wrong impressions about those which have been widely read. Mr Cockshut, moreover, has drawn together very skilfully the evidence of Trollope's passionate interest in certain situations and characters: the almost inevitably bad relations between fathers and sons, the 'snarling intimacy of family life', the desperation of girls whose only future is marriage, and whose labour in life is to entrap a suitably endowed husband. And yet the direction of the emphasis is wrong; it runs too directly against the main current of criticism. In his own day, Trollope's reviewers constantly stressed his choice of the middle range of humanity, of the ordinary man or woman, even the commonplace; they only wondered at his power of making it interesting, without distortion and without much apparent imaginative heightening of colour. Henry James's phrase succinctly comprehends the whole contemporary impression: 'His great, his inestimable merit was a complete appreciation of the usual.' The judgement is the more weighty, because a writer's contemporaries very rarely mistake the nature of his merit, though they often misjudge its degree. In concentrating so much attention upon Trollope's handling of the unusual, the heterodox, Mr Cockshut has indulged in an exaggeration, even if a useful one.

My own conviction is that all the essential qualities of Trollope are to be found in the two central series, and that there they are balanced in their right proportions. Outside them, only two novels appear to me to have a really strong claim on the general reader.

The first is *The Way We Live Now*. It was written in 1873, and it savagely satirized the new power of financiers and speculators in English life. Trollope saw them compassing the ruin, or at least the degradation, of the landed

gentry, literature, the press, social life, even the Court itself. It is a magnificently sustained piece of anger, imaginatively realized and dramatically presented. The last act of its great villain, Augustus Melmotte, ruined, drunk and defiant, trying to speak in Parliament, and glowering angrily but speechlessly round the House, has a force, both immediate and symbolic, beyond Trollope's usual range. In the previous year, *The Prime Minister* had appeared, and in it the new corruption of finance had been represented by a small-scale swindler, Lopez. Had Trollope but waited for his imagination to devise and select, he might have put the far greater figure of Melmotte in the same place. A novel in which Plantagenet Palliser was opposed to Melmotte, politically, morally and imaginatively, would in all probability have been Trollope's unquestioned masterpiece, his most complete comment on the values of his age. That it did not get written is the heaviest single penalty he paid for his precipitation in covering the daily stint of paper. But even so, *The Way We Live Now* deserves to be read more widely, and to be allowed a distinguished place beside the main political novels.

The second novel which I would specially commend is *The Claverings*, published in 1867. It is a work of a very different kind. It is short, and has a concentration of effect unusual in Trollope. There is no sub-plot to distract the development of the central situation, and all the characters play real parts in it. The main problem it explores, the hesitations and weaknesses of a young man between a beautiful but poor young girl to whom he is engaged, and an equally beautiful but rich widow whom he had loved before her marriage, is exactly of the kind to display at its best Trollope's ability to analyse the unheroic but not quite base man of common mould. But it is above all in its style that it is distinctive. For the most part, Trollope's manner of writing is adequate rather than eloquent, and so impersonal that one often feels it might have been practised by almost anyone else in the same period: though it is remark-

able how surely, in fact, a fair specimen of his work can be recognized for what it is. In *The Claverings*, however, more than in any other book, he showed what he could do when he was neither writing against the clock, nor merely 'for length'—the dreadful phrase is his own. It is not merely that as a whole the book is better written than most of the others, but that it also shows some of his subtler qualities of style more clearly than the rest.

There is, for example, a turn of phrase almost peculiar to him, and very characteristic of his ironically intimate report of the inner life: it depends upon the addition of some slight qualification to a previous statement. An example has been given already from the Archdeacon's reflections:

He told himself that he had feared God,—but he was not sure that he was telling himself the truth even in that.

Here are others:

He thought that he could give up racecourses; but he was sure that he could at any rate say that he would give them up. (*Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite*)

Colonel Osborne knew that his visit had been very innocent; but he did not like the feeling that even his innocence had been made the subject of observation. (*He Knew He Was Right*)

It cannot be said of him that he did much thinking for himself;—but he thought that he thought. (*The Prime Minister*)

In *The Claverings*, this characteristic Trollopian turn of phrase is used frequently, and especially in the depiction of the wavering hero. 'He told himself that he was an ass, but still he went on being an ass.' Thus he got himself into his trouble between the old love and the new, and in the midst of it, when he was being true to neither, Trollope concludes an address to the reader on the failings of his hero: 'He should have been chivalric, manly, full of high duty. He should have been all this, and full also of love, and then he would have been a hero. But men as I see them are not often heroic.'

Another of Trollope's characteristic devices was the repetition of a short phrase, at brief intervals but with such shifts of context, such exaggeration, that it acquired the ironic power conferred in the same manner on the phrase 'honourable men' in Antony's speech in *Julius Caesar*. In *The Claverings*, there are two fine examples of its use. One is in the twelfth chapter, describing the visit of the beautiful young widow to the splendid estate she had won by her loveless marriage, and the phrase woven through it is 'She had the price in her hands'. It gathers weight continually through the chapter, which ends upon the final bitter variation: 'She had the price in her hands, but she felt herself tempted to do as Judas did, to go out and hang herself.' Five chapters later, the same device is put to more openly comic and hostile uses, when the best mode of wooing this same rich young widow is discussed by Captain Clavering and Captain Boodle, after dinner at their club:

'Well, now, Clavvy, I'll tell you what my ideas are. When a man's trying a young filly, his hands can't be too light. A touch too much will bring her on her haunches, and throw her out of step. She should hardly feel the iron in her mouth. But when I've got to do with a trained mare, I always choose that she shall know that I'm there! Do you understand me?"'

'Yes; I understand you, Doodles.'

'I always choose that she should know I'm there.' And Captain Boodle, as he repeated these manly words with a firm voice, put out his hands as though he were handling the horse's rein.

After the phrase has been relished a further half-dozen times, Boodle leaves his friend alone to meditate upon it:

He sat the whole evening in the smoking-room, very silent, drinking slowly iced gin-and-water; and the more he drank the more assured he felt that he now understood the way in which he was to attempt the work before him. 'Let her know I'm there', he said to himself, shaking his head gently, so that no one should observe him; 'yes, let her know I'm there.' Everything was contained in that precept. And he, with his

hands before him on his knees, went through the process of steadyng a horse with the snaffle-rein, just touching the curb, as he did so, for security. It was but a motion of his fingers and no one could see it, but it made him confident that he had learned his lesson.

And in this way the phrase is made to undermine these two men, to reveal all their coarseness, their monotony of mind, their pompous ineptitude.

An acquaintance with *The Claverings*, then, is worth making not only for its own sake; it is probably the readiest way for a reader to sensitize himself to the subtler aspects of Trollope's style, and above all to his characteristic modes of irony. Without this sensitivity, none of his novels can be read rightly, for even in his dealings with the characters he knew and loved best—indeed especially with them—this irony is never far away. But its quality is so quiet, its onset so unostentatious, that it can easily be missed.

For these reasons, then, these two novels seem to deserve attention. But it must at once be added that many of the others are as good, and very possibly better. *Ralph the Heir*, for example, has some fine political scenes, and at least one character, Sir Thomas Underwood, profounder in conception than any in *The Way We Live Now*. *The Belton Estate* is comparable with *The Claverings* in its compression, and has a parallel theme, the hesitations of a young woman between two lovers, developed with all that power of creating a dramatic scene which has been illustrated above in the encounter between the Archdeacon and Miss Crawley. Others of the lesser-known novels which certainly deserve to be much better known are *Orley Farm*, *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite*, *Is He Popenjoy?*, *Dr Wortle's School* and *Ayala's Angel*. The list could easily be made much longer, but the reader who wishes to explore these novels further has no lack of guides. If he is interested in the gloomier and less 'usual' aspects in them, he cannot do better than follow Mr Cockshut; if, on the other hand, he prefers a more orthodox and central view, he should consult the *Commen-*

tary of Mr Michael Sadleir, to whom this generation owes much for defending and explaining a writer who seemed on the very point of slipping into oblivion.

But whatever he may choose to read, he should guard against two misconceptions which can prevent him from giving both himself and Trollope a fair chance. He should not, under the impression of length and weight of circumstance, mistake what is before him for mere photography, and so miss the real, though unostentatious imagination which has moulded it; nor should he let the apparent uniformity and directness of the style lull him into a hypnotic automatism, insensitive to those subtler turns of phrase which are so characteristic an expression of Trollope's 'moral consciousness', of his kindly but ironic perception of the gap between what we are, and what we ought to be, wish to be, or believe ourselves to be.

TROLLOPE

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—a short essay, but of special interest because it gives a first-hand impression of Trollope himself, and of the surprise felt by the writer that such fine qualities should have happened to lodge in so bluff and noisy a man.

CORRECTED IMPRESSIONS, by G. Saintsbury (1895)

—the short discussion of Trollope in the essay called 'Three Mid-Century Novelists', is a shallow and contemptuous attempt to record his 'comparative oblivion'. It may be of some interest as marking the nadir of his reputation. In his 'Trollope Revisited', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, Vol. VI, 1920, the same author copiously but indecisively admits that the oblivion had been, after all, only very comparative.

STUDIES OF A BIOGRAPHER, Vol. IV, by L. Stephen (1902)

—the essay on Trollope is short and pleasantly nostalgic; it treats him as a pleasing record of a peaceful but bygone age, and is the first expression of this mode of appreciating him.

A BOOK OF ESSAYS, by G. S. Street (1902)

—a short essay on Trollope claims for him a higher place than was usual at the time, and discusses his 'realism' with some penetration.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE: HIS WORK, ASSOCIATES AND LITERARY ORIGINALS,
by T. H. S. Escott (1913)

—the first full-length biography. Many details were filled in by a writer who knew Trollope personally.

THE POLITICAL NOVEL: ITS DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA,
by M. E. Speare; New York (1924)

—some interesting points are made about Trollope's treatment of politics, but the author is prevented from doing justice to him by his admiration of Disraeli, whom Trollope disliked both as a politician and as a novelist.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE, by S. van B. Nicholas;
New York (1925)

—only 490 copies of this booklet were printed. Some of its literary judgements are too enthusiastic, but it contains one of the first attempts to draw a map of Barsetshire, and to classify the novels.

TROLLOPE: A COMMENTARY, by M. Sadleir (1927)

—revised editions 1945, 1961.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE, by H. Walpole (1929)

PORTRAITS, by D. MacCarthy (1931)

FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF TROLLOPE, by C. C. Koets;
Amsterdam (1933).

EARLY VICTORIAN NOVELISTS, by Lord David Cecil (1934)

—a judicious estimate of Trollope is given, containing some valuable comparisons between him and some of his contemporaries, especially Jane Austen, who was his favourite novelist in his youth.

THE TROLLOPIAN, ed. B. A. Booth; Los Angeles (1945-49)

—a quarterly, continued after 1949 as *Nineteenth Century Fiction*.

THE TROLLOPES: THE CHRONICLE OF A WRITING FAMILY, by L. P. and R. P. Stebbins (1945)

—contains much biographical information about Trollope's mother and his eldest brother Thomas Adolphus, and one of the first attempts to emphasize the gloomier and less orthodox strains in Trollope himself.

TROLLOPE: A NEW JUDGEMENT, by E. Bowen; Oxford (1946)

ANTHONY TROLLOPE, by B. C. Brown (1950)

—a sympathetic attempt to define the 'theme' common to the novels, and some illuminating suggestions about the effect of Civil Service experience upon Trollope's approach to life and people.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE: A CRITICAL STUDY, by A. O. J. Cockshut (1955).

A CENTURY OF TROLLOPE CRITICISM, by R. Helling; Helsinki (1956)

—a detailed survey of the ups and downs of Trollope's reputation from his own day to the present, with a good selection of quotations from the original reviews, and a good bibliography of Trollope criticism.

THE HERO IN ECLIPSE IN VICTORIAN FICTION, by M. Praz (1956)

—the long chapter on Trollope is perhaps the most favourable and discriminating judgement so far made by a writer neither English or American.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE: ASPECTS OF HIS LIFE AND WORK, by B. A. Booth (1959)

—this very learned study is specially interesting on the social background, and the vagaries of Trollope's fame.

I. COMPTON-BURNETT:
Pamela Hansford Johnson

JOSEPH CONRAD: Oliver Warner
WALTER DE LA MARE: K. Hopkins
NORMAN DOUGLAS: Ian Greenlees
T. S. ELIOT: M. C. Bradbrook
FIRBANK & BETJEMAN: J. Brooke
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J. MIDDLETON MURRY: Philip Mairet
SEAN O'CASEY: W. A. Armstrong
GEORGE ORWELL: Tom Hopkinson
POETS OF 1939-45 WAR: R. N. Currey
POWYS BROTHERS: R. C. Churchill
J. B. PRIESTLEY: Ivor Brown
HERBERT READ: Francis Berry
FOUR REALIST NOVELISTS: V. Brome
BERNARD SHAW: A. C. Ward
EDITH SITWELL: John L. Morgan
OSBERT SITWELL: Robert L. Ward
KENNETH SLESSOR: Christopher Innes
C. P. SNOW: William Cross
STRACHEY: R. A. Scott
SYNGE & LADY GREGORY:
Elizabeth Cross
DYLAN THOMAS: G. S. Fraser
EDWARD THOMAS: Vernon Scannell
G. M. TREVELyan: J. H. Innes
WAR POETS: 1914-18: E. D. H. T. Innes
EVELYN WAUGH: Christopher Innes
H. G. WELLS: Montgomery
PATRICK WHITE: R. F. Briant
CHARLES WILLIAMS: J. Heatwole
VIRGINIA WOOLF: B. Blackstone
W. B. YEATS: G. S. Fraser
ANDREW YOUNG & R. S. THOMAS:
L. Clark and R. G. Thomas